

Mugabe may attend Mozambican talks

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HARARE. — Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe may attend next month's crucial peace meeting in Rome between Mozambique's President Joaquim Chissano and rebel leader, Mr Afonso Dhlakama, official sources said yesterday.

Mr Mugabe has been active in brokering a peace accord to end a bitter 16-year civil war in Mozambique in which an estimated one million people have died.

The sources said Mr Mugabe might go to Rome for the first-ever meeting between the Mozambican rivals, which Mr Dhlakama expected to take place on August 3.

Peace talks between representatives of the Maputo government and Mr Dhlakama's rebel Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo) have been taking place on an intermittent basis in Rome for the past two years.

Diplomats noted that the late Mozambican president, Mr Samora Machel, had played what one described as a "decisive" role in the Lancaster House talks in London which ended White minority rule in then Rhodesia and led to Black majority rule in an independent Zimbabwe in 1980.

Landlocked Zimbabwe has a major interest in encouraging peace in Mozambique, which provides two important transport corridors to the Indian Ocean.

Mr Mugabe has met Mr Dhlakama twice and diplomatic sources said Zimbabwe had been dubious about the Renamo leader's sincerity in seeking peace. They said however that Mr Mugabe appeared to have been convinced at the second meeting in Botswana two weeks ago that Mr Dhlakama was serious in wanting an end to the war.

Mr Chissano said he was willing to meet Mr Dhlakama for the first time after meetings last weekend with South Africa's State President De Klerk and Mr Mugabe himself. — Sapa-Reuter